

THIEU CHARGES U.S. AID CUTS REDUCING VIETNAM ARMY'S EFFICIENCY

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(BY JEAN LOUIS ARNAUD)

(TEXT) SAIGON, JAN 30 (AFP)--SOUTH VIETNAMESE PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU YESTERDAY CHARGED THAT CUTS IN U.S. AID HAD REDUCED THE COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS OF HIS ARMY BY ALMOST TWO-THIRDS AND THAT THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE PEOPLE WERE BEGINNING TO FEEL THE UNITED STATES HAD LET THEM DOWN.

THE 300 MILLION DOLLARS IN ADDITIONAL AID FOR SOUTH VIETNAM ADVOCATED BY PRESIDENT GERALD FORD WAS THE MINIMUM WE BADLY NEEDED TO SUSTAIN THE CURRENT SITUATION, MR. THIEU DECLARED AT A BREAKFAST MEETING WITH FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS HERE.

THE EXTRA MONEY WOULD NOT BE ENOUGH TO DEFEAT THE COMMUNISTS OR TO HALT THEIR ATTACKS. MR. THIEU STRESSED. HE NOTED THAT THE PROPOSED LEVEL OF AMERICAN MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO SOUTH VIETNAM HAD BEEN FIRST PUT AT 1,600 MILLION DOLLARS LAST YEAR BUT THAT CONGRESS HAD EVENTUALLY APPROVED AID AMOUNTING TO ONLY 700 MILLION DOLLARS.

THE CUTS HAD MEANT A 60-PERCENT DROP IN THE COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMED FORCES AND COMMUNIST TROOPS IN SOUTH VIETNAM NOW ENJOYED A SUPERIORITY OF FIREPOWER FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE WAR, MR. THIEU AFFIRMED. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME MR. THIEU HAD REVEALED THAT HIS TROOPS WERE BEING OUTGUNNED ON THE BATTLEFIELD.

THE COMMUNISTS HAD BOOSTED THEIR MILITARY POTENTIAL IN THE SOUTH BY FROM THREE TO FIVE TIMES SINCE 1972, BEFORE THE PEACE AGREEMENTS SIGNED IN PARIS TWO YEARS AGO, MR. THIEU CLAIMED.

HE ADDED THAT HE HAD BEEN ASSURED BY U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE HENRY KISSINGER AT THE TIME OF THE CEASE-FIRE THAT BOTH CHINA AND THE SOVIET UNION HAD AGREED DURING SUMMIT MEETINGS TO RESTRAIN THEIR DELIVERIES OF MUNITIONS TO THE COMMUNIST FORCES AND TO URGE NORTH VIETNAMESE LEADERS TO ABIDE BY THE PARIS AGREEMENTS TO BRING ABOUT A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT.

YOU CAN SEE FOR YOURSELVES WHAT HAPPENED, THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE PRESIDENT COMMENTED.

HE ADDED THAT HE DID NOT KNOW HOW TO BRING THE COMMUNISTS TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE ONCE AGAIN ALTHOUGH HE SAID HIS GOVERNMENT HAD ANNOUNCED ITS READINESS FOR TALKS ON FIVE OCCASIONS SINCE LAST SEPTEMBER. THE COMMUNIST PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT (PRG) IN SOUTH VIETNAM HAS BEEN DEMANDING MR. THIEU'S REMOVAL FROM POWER AS A PRE-CONDITION FOR TALKS SINCE OCTOBER OF LAST YEAR.

MR. THIEU SAID HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE...  
MR. FORD No Objection to Declassification in Full 2010/06/10 : LOC-HAK-244-8-1-1  
TO VOTE MORE A.I.D. NOTHING COULD STOP THE AMERICAN PEOPLE FROM  
MAKING A 180-DEGREE TURNABOUT IN THEIR POLICY, HE DECLARED.

HE ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT HE HAD NOT LOST FAITH IN A CONTINUITY  
IN A POLICY THAT HAD BEEN FOLLOWED BY FOUR AMERICAN PRESIDENTS  
AND ENDORSED BY BOTH MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES.

ABANDONING SOUTHEAST ASIA TO CHINA WOULD LEAD TO AN ABANDONMENT  
OF OTHER COUNTRIES OR OTHER CONTINENTS TO THE SOVIET UNION, MR.  
THIEU STATED.

HE REFUSED TO SAY WHETHER HE FELT ANY SENSE OF PERSONAL  
BETRAYAL. THIS WAS NOT THE TIME TO SPEAK ON THIS SUBJECT, MR.  
THIEU SAID.

BUT HE ADDED THAT SOUTH VIETNAMESE PEOPLE WERE BEGINNING TO  
BELIEVE THEY HAD BEEN DECEIVED BY THE U.S.

MR. THIEU SAID HE BELIEVED HIS ARMY COULD HOLD OUT THROUGH  
975 BUT THAT THE SITUATION WOULD BECOME VERY DANGEROUS AFTER  
THAT IF AMERICAN AID WAS NOT FORTHCOMING.

MR THIEU CLAIMED HE HAD NEVER BEEN AN OBSTACLE TO PEACE AS THE  
PRG HAS CHARGED. INSTEAD, HE AFFIRMED HE CONSTITUTED THE  
PRINCIPLE OBSTACLE FACING THE COMMUNISTS IN THEIR DRIVE TO CONQUER  
SOUTH VIETNAM BY FORCE OF ARMS.

TODAY'S MEETING WITH FOREIGN NEWSMEN WAS THE FIRST DIRECT  
CONTACT MR THIEU HAS HAD WITH THE PRESS CORPS HERE FOR SEVERAL  
YEARS AND HE CHATTED IN A RELAXED WAY OVER A CUP OF COFFEE AND  
A BOWL OF NOODLE SOUP, THE FAVOURITE BREAKFAST OF THE VIETNAMESE.  
THE MEETING CAME ONLY DAYS AFTER PRESIDENT FORD'S REQUEST FOR  
MORE AID FOR THE SAIGON GOVERNMENT.

TURNING TO HIS OWN PLANS, MR. THIEU SAID HE WOULD REMAIN  
IN POWER AS LONG AS PEOPLE NEED ME. HE DID NOT, HOWEVER, REVEAL  
WHETHER HE WOULD SEEK A THIRD TERM AS PRESIDENT IN ELECTIONS  
SCHEDULED FOR SEPTEMBER OF THIS YEAR.

BEFORE MAKING A DECISION, MR THIEU SAID HE WANTED TO IMPROVE  
THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT'S MILITARY POSITION, TO PUSH  
FORWARD ADMINISTRATIVE REFORMS AT VILLAGE AND HAMLET LEVEL AND  
TO RESTART SOUTH VIETNAM'S STUMBLING ECONOMY.

MORE)

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ONLY ADD 70 (THIEU PRESS CONFERENCE)

XXX VIETNAM'S STUMBLING ECONOMY.

(TEXT) MR THIEU SAID HE WOULD BE ENCOURAGED TO DECLARE HIMSELF A CANDIDATE IF HE WAS SUCCESSFUL IN THESE THREE FIELDS. THE COMMUNISTS, HE CLAIMED, WERE HOPEFUL TO BRING ABOUT HIS OVERTHROW BEFORE THE SEPTEMBER ELECTIONS.

THEY WOULD TRY TO PREVENT HIM FROM BEING A CANDIDATE, TRY TO DEFEAT HIM IF HE RAN FOR OFFICE AND TRY TO BRING HIM DOWN IF HE WAS ELECTED, MR THIEU DECLARED.

ASKED WHY HE HAD NOT REPLIED PUBLICLY TO OPPOSITION CHARGES IN RECENT MONTHS THAT HE AND MEMBERS OF HIS FAMILY WERE CORRUPT, MR. THIEU REPLIED BRUSQUELY THAT ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY HIMSELF OR HIS WIFE HAD BEEN STRICTLY LEGAL.

ANY PUBLIC REPLY TO ACCUSATIONS OF CORRUPTION WOULD BE SEIZED UPON BY THE COMMUNISTS AS THE BASIS FOR CALUMNY. HE CLAIMED IF HE AND HIS WIFE HAD DONE WRONG IT WAS FOR THE COURTS TO ACT BECAUSE THEY WERE BOTH CITIZENS WHO COULD BE BROUGHT BEFORE THE BAR OF JUSTICE, MR THIEU STATED.

MR THIEU, WHO MARKS HIS 52ND BIRTHDAY IN APRIL, DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS A SIMPLE MANNY WHO HAD SPENT MOST OF HIS YEARS LIVING AS A VILLAGER.

LIFE IN SAIGON'S PRESIDENTIAL PALACE OFFERED LITTLE ATTRACTION TO HIM, MR THIEU DECLARED. LEAVING IT WOULD BE NO HARDSHIP. HE AND HIS BROTHERS AND SISTERS WERE ALL SELF-MADE, HE STATED.

I AM A SOLDIER, MR THIEU DECLARED BEFORE HIS RISE TO POWER A DECADE AGO, HE WAS AN ARMY GENERAL) BUT HE DENIED THAT HE WAS A WARMAKER. HE WAS A DEFENSIVE SOLDIER WHO HAD BECOME A POLITICIAN THROUGH FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCE, HE DECLARED, WIELDING HIS CHOPSTICKS TO EAT THE NOODLES IN HIS BOWL OF SOUP.

THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE PRESIDENT SAID HE HOPED THERE WOULD BE SEVERAL CANDIDATES FOR HIS JOB NEXT SEPTEMBER. TWO OR THREE WOULD BE TOO FEW, TEN WOULD BE TOO MANY, BUT FOUR OR FIVE WOULD BE IDEAL, HE SAID.

HE DENIED CHARGES THAT HE SOUGHT TO ELIMINATE OPPOSITION. RECALLING A PROVERB HE HAD LEARNED FROM HIS FATHER WHICH SAID THAT IF YOU WANTED TO MAKE THE LIGHTS SHINE MORE BRIGHTLY IN YOUR HOUSE THAN IN THAT OF YOUR NEIGHBOUR, YOU SHOULD ADD MORE LIGHTS RATHER THAN BREAK YOUR NEIGHBOURS LAMPS WITH A STICK.

MR. THIEU SAID HE HAD NO OBJECTION TO POLITICAL OPPOSITION IN SOUTH VIETNAM'S PARLIAMENT, IN THE CHURCHES OR BUDDHIST PAGODAS. BUT HE HAD MADE IT KNOWN THAT HE WOULD NOT PERMIT POLITICAL OPPONENTS TO DISTURB PUBLIC ORDER BY TAKING TO THE STREETS.

ENDALL)